



SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

EXHIBIT NO. ~~SB~~ 16

DATE 1-26-09

BILL NO. SB6

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING CENTER

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January 26, 2009

Senator Ron Erickson
Local Government Committee
Montana Senate
P.O. Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

RE: Senate Bill 6 – Public Water Supply Connection Fees

Dear Senator Erickson,

As a professional in the water and wastewater industry in Montana for the past 16 years as a training and development specialist, university instructor, researcher, wastewater treatment plant operator, collection system operator, water treatment plant operator, distribution system operator and currently training center director I can attest to the extreme importance of SB6 becoming law in Montana.

Since 1991 the public water supply connection fees have provided the funds necessary for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Montana Environmental Training Center (METC) to provide training and technical assistance to Montana's public water supply systems and their operators. The connection fees have been used to contract with county sanitarians and others to conduct sanitary surveys of public water supply systems, to employ a staff of one for METC to provide training to Montana's water operators, and to employ staff at DEQ to implement the rules and regulations associated with the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) and the Montana Public Water Supply Act.

DEQ has provided training and technical assistance to Montana's operators with the same amount of funding since 1993. While funding has not increased the number of SDWA rules that DEQ is mandated by the SDWA to implement and maintain with rule adoptions, operator training, monitoring schedules, compliance tracking, technical assistance visits, and enforcement actions has increased from a few to 31 very complex rules.

METC has been providing training since 1988 when it was instituted as a joint venture between Montana State University – Northern and DEQ. During which time METC has sponsored over 600 quality workshops and schools in Montana reaching well over 13,000 participants. In 2005 METC made cut backs, reducing staff from 2.5 employees to 1.0 and reducing workshops and schools from 40 per year to 25 per year.

If SB6 is not passed DEQ will no longer have funding to send personnel across Montana to provide training and technical assistance to any of Montana's public water supply systems. Also if SB6 does not pass METC will have to close its doors within one year.



The following training sponsored by METC and DEQ and primarily taught by DEQ personnel would certainly no longer be available.

Fall Water School in Bozeman (in its 76th year)

Spring Water Schools in Kalispell and Billings (in the 17th year)

Summer School in Helena (in its 14th year)

Plus the other 20+ training courses METC and DEQ have on the calendar for 2009.

Operators have come to rely upon these long standing training opportunities to meet their continuing education credit requirements which you the legislature have mandated operators earn by passing laws to that effect.

Not only will DEQ and METC drastically be affected by the tabling of SB6 but Montana Rural Water Systems, Midwest Assistance Program, Montana Water Center, Montana Section of the American Water Works Association, Montana Water Environmental Association, and the Montana Environmental Health Association and their associated members will be affected as well, as DEQ will no longer be able to provide training and technical assistance for these organizations either. Currently these organizations in turn help DEQ provide training and technical assistance to Montana's public water supply systems and operators.

Now speaking as someone who has been a water treatment plant and wastewater treatment plant operator for both a larger system in Montana and a smaller system in Montana I can attest to the extreme importance of having DEQ provide on-site technical assistance and more formal classroom training. When asked by a smaller water and sewer system in Montana if I could help them I did not know how badly the systems had been neglected. Had it not been for many DEQ personnel and their knowledge and ability to provide me the information I needed to make proper decisions and educate the small system water and sewer district board I would not have made the progress I did as an operator. From a small system operator's standpoint it is imperative that DEQ and METC continue to have the financial means necessary to conduct training, technical assistance and evaluations of public water supply systems in Montana. By not doing so Montana will seriously jeopardize losing primacy for administering the SDWA in Montana. AND most importantly the public health of Montanans will be in severe jeopardy.

So once again I strongly urge you to bring SB6 to the legislature for a passing vote.

Sincerely,



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Cc: . Senators - John Esp, Jeff Essman, Gregory Barkus, Steve Gallus, Kim Gillan, Jesse Laslovich, Verdell Jackson, Jesse Laslovich, Bruce Tutvedt, Rick Ripley, Jerry Black and Ken Hansen. Representatives - Russell Bean, Llew Jones, Bob Bergren and Roy Hollandsworth